Social at Work

Social Networking has taken the Internet by storm, and enterprise collaboration vendors have taken notice. Here are features to consider.

By Matthew Sarrel

VMware View 4.5
Fedora 14
T-Mobile G2
VMware View 4.5 is a VDI pacesetter

REVIEW: VMware View 4.5 VDI gains enterprise features, including support for Windows 7, Mac OS X and Local Mode.

By Cameron Sturdevant

VMware View 4.5, which started shipping Sept. 13, gained enterprise features, including role-based administration, Local Mode (formerly known as Offline Desktop), full support for Windows 7 and a View client for Mac OS X devices, making this version the pacesetter for virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI).

View 4.5 View Premier, the version that enables Local Mode and most other storage and customization features, costs $250 per concurrent user. View Enterprise, which is more suited for general mass deployment, costs $150 per concurrent use.

To test VMware View 4.5, I created a vSphere 4.1 test environment that included a View Connection Server, a View Transfer Server and several virtual machine templates. The View server components were integrated with a vCenter 4.1 server, along with a Microsoft Windows Active Directory infrastructure to handle user rights and the new role-based administration. Much of this infrastructure setup is similar to what is needed for View 4.

Desktop administrators who are familiar with View 4 will have no trouble using this newest version. Those new to VDI should set aside at least one week to install and fine-tune a test setup to learn the ins and outs of View 4.5.

Desktop administrators will need to work with experts in systems, networks and storage to take full advantage of the resource-saving improvements in View 4.5.

In particular, my work with this version of View showed that IT managers who focus on virtual machine template configuration and use the most current version of VMware’s vSphere infrastructure can push license and infrastructure costs down to a level that makes virtual desktop deployment competitive with traditional physical systems.

Disconnected desktop operation

While VMware View 4 played with a feature called “Offline Desktop,” View 4.5 fully embraces disconnected desktop operation through what is now called Local Mode. I was able to install a VMware View Client with Local Mode on a laptop, log on and check out a virtual machine that I was then able to use while disconnected from the View infrastructure.

In my case, I was using a Lenovo ThinkPad Edge laptop with an Intel Core i3 processor and 2GB of RAM running a 32-bit version of Windows 7 Enterprise. I installed the View Client, which was already configured to use my View Connection Server, logged on, selected a Windows 7 desktop and checked it out for use on my laptop. Because the laptop was using a 32-bit operating system, I also checked out a 32-bit desktop system.

The check-out system ran workloads without a hitch. When I reconnected to the View infrastructure, I was able to check the desktop back in, and my test
workload was safely back on my data center infrastructure.

As a View administrator I was able to control whether the Local Mode desktop could use features such as USB redirection and printers. The View Client, which makes all the Local Mode magic happen, was easy to configure and provided me with ample control over the use of the checked-out desktop system. I was able to check in the system to return control to the View 4.5 infrastructure.

**Testing with Windows 7**

I made a point of conducting most of my testing using Microsoft Windows 7 virtual and physical systems. New in this version of View is full support for the Windows 7 operating system. For more on how testing with View works using Windows XP systems, you can read my earlier review of View 4. Working with Windows 7 32- and 64-bit versions worked without any noticeable problems.

For example, using Windows 7, I created virtual machines that then served as template systems for my View test clients. Because of changes in Windows 7 (it now includes Sysprep) and improvements to View 4.5 (the product recognizes and uses the changes in Windows 7), creating desktop pools was significantly easier than it was in View 4.

In addition to making Local Mode a full citizen, VMware also beefed up role-based administration in View 4.5. For IT managers in medium- to large-size organizations, this additional administrative control is an essential addition to View 4.5.

I was able to assign administrative rights, such as entitling users to access desktops. I was also able to use the privilege-based access control system to restrict what different View administrators could see, including usage reports and the monitoring dashboards for various pools of virtual desktops. Roles vary from full global configuration and policy administrators who have access to everything to read-only administrators who can see only the restricted sets of virtual desktop inventory. Administrative roles that are limited in scope are partially based on View folders.

As with Windows Vista, the desktop OS migration drums are sounding throughout the land. View 4.5 can play a role in migrating users from Windows XP to Windows 7 because the product now fully supports Windows 7 systems. Aside from this, there were no other migration tools that were apparent in my tests.

IT managers can safely ignore the marketing hype focused on migration and use their time and energy to evaluate the other technical developments in View 4.5. Among these is support for Mac OS X.

I was able to use the View Mac OS X client on a Mac Pro and access my Windows desktop pools. The client worked well enough, and Mac users who occasionally need to use a Windows system will likely find the encounter with a temporary Windows desktop palatable enough to use for short periods of time.

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